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ABSTRACT

This paper explains the methodology for combining reading and art instruction in a Learning to Read Through the Arts program. Art and reading teachers collaborate to determine the vocabulary required for discussion of each art project. Once this is done, the art teacher uses that vocabulary in a discussion of the art topic, and the reading teacher, in turn, applies reading and writing assignments to the art subject. In this way, reading skills are developed as they apply to other subjects, making reading a learning tool and integrating the learning experience. (RL)

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INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION

Wednesday, May 4, 1977, 2:00 to 4:45 P. M.
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SYMPOSIUM

LEARNING TO READ THROUGH THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES

Chairperson: Bernadette C. O'Brien, Education Director, Title I Children's Program, Learning to Read Through the Arts (Associated with The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum), Learning to Read Through the Arts, Inc.; Coordinator, Arts and Humanities Programs, Roosevelt Island Schools.

LEARNING TO READ THROUGH THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES
A READING PROGRAM--AN ART PROGRAM

Speaker: Bernadette C. O'Brien
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Academic achievement requires skill in reading. Reading is a process that requires content. The arts and humanities supply that content in the Learning to Read Through the Arts and Humanities Programs.

Formerly one of the major goals in elementary education was "learning to read". Now the emphasis is placed on "reading to learn"[1]

Back in 1971 we based the nationally recognized exemplary prototype Title I Learning to Read Through the Arts Program, Associated with The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and The Division of Community School District Affairs of the New York City Board of Education[2] on this premise. After eleven programs we continue to utilize this concept as well as other accepted learning theory.

There have since been replications, adaptations and adapters of the Learning to Read Through the Arts (LTRTA) methodology. These include the District 6 Title I Cloisters Museum/Workshop Learning to Read Through the Arts Program, the District 6 Title IV, Part C, Learning to Read Through the Arts Guggenheim Replication,[3] the Title III Improving Visual Perceptual Skills in Art Classes in High Schools, Reading Improvement Through Art.[4] In addition,

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1 Albert J. Harris. How to Increase Reading Ability, (New York; David McKay Company, Inc., 1965), p. 4.

2 Education Director, Bernadette C. O'Brien.
Program Coordinator, Myrna G. Weiner.

3 Project Director, Cecille Davis, Supervisor of Art, District 6.

4 Project Director, Sylvia Corwin, Assistant Principal/Supervision of Art, John F. Kennedy High School.

Learning to Read Through the Arts, Inc.[5], [6] has funded the following LTRTA Programs at the Roosevelt Island Schools[7] in Manhattan: the Baschet Musical Sculptures, Consolidated Edison's Art and the People, and a Yoga Workshop; and it has collaborated with Community Environments, Inc.[8] in funding the Waterscapes Roosevelt Island Schools projects. Cultural institutions such as The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, The Cloisters Museum and The Indian Museum have made funds, space and/or services available to the LTRTA projects.

The Learning to Read Through the Arts and Humanities Programs at the Roosevelt Island Schools, though staffed by LTRTA, Inc. consultants, will eventually be staffed by the schools' classroom teachers and the schools' arts and humanities specialists trained in the Learning to Read Through the Arts methodology. This is the basic strategy for introducing LTRTA programs in any interested school or school system.

Too often within the school learning program, experiences are isolated. This fragmentation of the learning process into isolated segments creates an artificial situation. A child does not grow in single subject matter areas, nor does each area re-

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5 A non-profit organization. President, Project Development Officer, Natalie Lieberman.

6 Education/Project Director; Coordinator, Arts and Humanities Programs, Roosevelt Island Schools, Bernadette C. O'Brien.

7 Principal/Director, Charlotte Schiff, P. S./I. S. 217, District 2, Roosevelt Island Schools.

8 A non-profit organization. Director, Barry Cohen.

main isolated in life outside school. This early specialization has isolated some of the subject matter areas from day to day experiences to such a degree that the subjects no longer seem related to society. We can even see this at the upper levels of education where there is a great discrepancy between social and scientific achievement. Sometimes art is used as a means of correcting this difficulty, usually with superficial results. Because art is generally looked upon by the child as an attractive experience, and some of the social studies, arithmetic or writing exercises are less favorably viewed, the correlation of these subject matter areas with art may have a negative value for the art experience. It is a little like mixing medicine with orange juice--both can be rejected.

It is possible that an integrated experience can develop from a school setting, but the separate parts must lose their identity and the individual child must feel that there is a meaningful whole with which he can identify. Integration occurs within the individual. The child is influenced by his emotional responses and perceptual sensory experiences. If the youngster can become totally involved in the learning process, then real integration takes place.[2]

The Learning to Read Through the Arts Program is a total art and a total reading program. The art specialists and the reading specialists form the instructional team. Because the art

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2 Victor Lowenfeld/W. Lambert Brittain, Creative and Mental Growth, 5th Edition, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970), p. 74.

experiences lead the child to comprehension and word identification reading skills, these achievements become the major strength of the program. The child uses all his senses to learn. He sees, hears, touches, smells and/or tastes his projects. Each of these experiences helps him to perceive, recall and reinforce what he is learning. The process is as important as the product. Some skills that he is learning through his art experience will be helpful to him when learning to read. However, a linkage must be made in order for the student to correlate the skills learned in the different subject areas. The Learning to Read Through the Arts methodology attempts to make this linkage. For example: The teacher presents a painting to the child and together they notice the details of the painting and use the spoken and written word to describe these details. Then as the student works on his own painting, using various colors and shapes and designs, it becomes possible for him to determine words both spoken and written that describe his work. He becomes aware of the details developing in his own painting and he now finds that the details of his own art work can be described through language. It is a simple matter to convert this information into written form by presenting to the child reading exercises in "grasping detail" that will have become especially meaningful to him.

We have found that if children are able to read material and apply the information thus acquired to some practical purpose, the children are interested in what they are reading and they recall what they have read. The reading becomes a tool to learn

more about the arts and humanities.

The art instructors are trained in the Learning to Read Through the Arts methodology. They build on the language the child already knows by using a modified language experience approach in other reading oriented arts workshops.

In a language experience approach the following procedures work best: The art teachers and pupils decide on an art project. The students verbalize about the experience with the instructor. As the students express themselves, the instructor elicits a few sentences that sum up what has been said. A short composition is written by the instructor in the master journal while the pupils watch. The instructor calls attention to details that are important to reading, such as letter formation, association of sounds with symbols, repetition of the same sounds or symbols, the function of capitalization and punctuation, phrasing and vocabulary development. The group composition serves as the basis for discussion in which letters and words are recognized.[10]

Students maintain personal, individual journals. In them they copy the writings of the master journal as well as their statement of purpose for each art project, relevant technical information and writings that develop from the art books in the reading corner.

Purposeful re-reading of the entries in the teacher's master

10 Nila Banton Smith, Reading Instruction for Today's Children, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 81.

journal and in the student's log is scheduled. The purpose is to recall vocabulary and to reinforce comprehension. Therefore, the topics of the journal entries take the form of work charts, summaries, critiques, following directions activities, artists' biographies or definition of the vocabulary used in the workshop activity.

The art teacher, in collaboration with the reading teacher, determines, in advance, the vocabulary required for discussion and completion of each art project. These words are lettered and posted around the art room and referred to frequently. The art teacher may ask students to write the words in context, in the form of a definition, a story or an information account. Throughout the life of the art project these words are repeated . . . . verbally and visually. The vocabulary may be specialized or normed to grade level. The instructor corrects the student journals and written materials for language and content.

The reading teachers use an individualized, prescriptive, remediation or enrichment approach. The students' reading weaknesses are diagnosed through the Wisconsin Design Skill Development Tests, the California Reading Achievement Test and informal testing. A prescription is prepared.

Most of the prescriptive materials are teacher-made because the content of the reading material relates to the art projects the students are experiencing. Books, stencils, story boards, charts, filmstrips, tapes and records are the materials used in the program. The design also includes student participation

in a research period to gather information about the art projects. For another period the children use a multi media library comprised of such items as books, records, tapes and filmstrips. Thereby they further develop their interest in and appreciation of reading. Specialized vocabulary and grade level vocabulary are exchanged by specialists in order that each specialist will reinforce the vocabulary in both the art and reading workshops.

In addition to the arts and reading workshops, children go on regular field trips to cultural institutions and educational resource sites. Special events and/or performances are also brought to the program periodically. In this way the students have an opportunity to research a primary source such as an original painting, sculpture or manuscript, or they may see a professional theater performance, hear a concert or see a dance troupe.

Also, the students have an opportunity to showcase their own original works and accomplishments in the annual "Year With Children" exhibition and "The Performing Arts and Film Festival" held at The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

Parents' workshops are an important part of the program in order that the parents may understand the program, learn how children learn, and have an opportunity to discuss family living. Also, the parents may serve as workshop or field trip assistants or become members of the program's Advisory Board. We found this aspect of the program most valuable to everyone involved in the project.

Pre-service and in-service training are necessary for both

art and reading specialists and staff. An on-going evaluation of the project is also desirable.

In 1975 the program was designated by the American Institute of Research for the National Right to Read Effort of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare as one of twelve exemplary programs in the nation. In 1976 the program was designated as one of thirty-three Title I exemplary programs in the nation, and in 1976 the New York State Art Teachers Association awarded The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum an award for their outstanding work in the Learning to Read Through the Arts Program.

It has been shown that students' reading improved on an average of one to two months for each month the students participated in the program. This is well beyond the normal expectancy rate. They have also improved in their interest, knowledge and skill in the artistic areas as well.

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RESOURCE MATERIALS

Management Handbook Teachers' Manual and sound filmstrip about Learning to Read Through the Arts available from:

Order Department
National Audovisual Center (GSA)
Washington, D. C. 20409

For information on Learning to Read Through the Arts Programs write to:

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